

**REPORT OF THE  
COMMISSION ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN AFFAIRS RETREAT SESSIONS  
September 16-17, 2004 – Spokane, Washington**

Commission Chair Victoria Woods convened the first retreat session of the Commission on African-American Affairs at 12:20 p.m., September 16, 2004. The session on September 16 was attended by Commissioners Karen Boone, Angela M. Brooks, Frank Boykin, Earl Ford, Anne M. Houston-Rogers, Zelma Maine-Jackson, David Tyner III, Victoria Woodards, and Executive Director Regina Jones, Legislative Liaison Edward Prince, and staff member Mary Bearden. Chairperson Woodards introduced the retreat facilitator, Rhonda Hilyer, who reviewed the retreat's purpose and agenda items and summarized key points from her phone interviews with Commissioners. She then invited the Commissioners and staff to introduce themselves and to provide some biographical history in view of the new mix of incoming and incumbent Commissioners. The group briefly reviewed the facilitator's role and proposed participation guidelines. The facilitator then presented a communication styles workshop to assist the group in getting to know and understand one another in terms of communication preferences, approaches to decision-making, problem solving and conflict resolution.

After a break, Chairperson Woodards produced a historical overview of the Commission's history, its challenges and accomplishments. She emphasized that the Commission and the current Executive Director have undertaken the essential work of setting up the infrastructure necessary for the Commission to function effectively. For

example, the bylaws are completed. In 2002, an action plan precursor to the current strategic plan was formulated and out of that the website was designed and activated. Also, progress has been made in elevating the status of the Commission. While the CAAA is the youngest of the Commissions (15 years old) and does not have the same authority as the other two, it now has the same funding level.

Chairperson Woodards expressed her regret in leaving the Commission and her excitement that the Commission is now poised to move forward and has the opportunity to make more of a difference. She touched on the importance of clarifying community perceptions about the mission and effectiveness of the Commission as well as the need to produce tangible results. She stressed the value of all Commissioners completing their activity reports. Ms. Woodards recommended that the Commission focus on accomplishing one or two priorities with excellence in the coming year. She underscored the hard work of the staff and emphasized the need to respect their heavy workload. She then turned to the incoming Chair, Zelma Main-Jackson to review the mission and roles of Commissioners and staff as well as her vision for the future of the Commission. Ms. Main-Jackson welcomed the new Commissioners and stated that the Governor has confidence in his appointees and staff. Commissioner Main-Jackson highlighted the importance of reaching out to and representing the entire state population of African descent. In a statement of further clarification she explained that: "It took years of evaluating performance, some success and failures, lots of personal searching for value-added reasons for participation on CAAA and most importantly, evaluating CAAA's impact to those in our communities who are underrepresented,

low-income or no income and with various linguistic and multicultural differences. Yes, CAAA should represent all the population in Washington state who are of African descent because the general population identify us visually by skin tones, hair, use of the English language and our overall physical presentation. The 2000 census indicates that African-Americans represent approximately 190,000 individuals or 3% of Washington state's population. What about the 322,000 individuals of African descent who claim more than one ethnic culture or whose birthplace is South America, Africa or the Caribbean Islands and who are visually considered by the general population as African-American? CAAA has traditionally not even considered outreaching to those African-Americans. During this transition period, let us not forget we are the same. They are taxed and need representation on CAAA. I recommend that the next appointment to CAAA be a monolingual individual from sub-Saharan African or the Caribbean Islands."

Commissioners provided support as they discussed this statement of vision.

Next Commissioner Main-Jackson focused the group on the mission and the need to review RCW 43.113.030, the Commissioners' duties and powers, relationship between them and the Governor. Copies of the mission statement, RCW 43.113.030 and the bylaws/standing procedures were distributed, reviewed and discussed.

Commissioner Maine-Jackson reiterated that this is an Advisory (not a rule-making) Commission. She also suggested that clarification be provided on the website that this Commission is chartered to advise on policy and as such is not a social services

or advocacy group. The group discussed the need to better communicate this distinction to the community.

Executive Director Regina Jones pointed out that internally this Commission has accomplished a great deal. Over the past nine months, its list of accomplishments included:

- Participation in Voter Education and Mobilization – Let Justice Roll! Project
- African American Education Summit – sponsor, planning/steering committee, key community contacts and break-out presenter (on legislative issues)
- Economic Development Leadership on Access, Influence and Capacity
- Legislative Day 2004– significantly increased attendance
- Joint Meeting Minority Commission Members – planned and executed meeting logistics
- Joint Minority Commission Legislative Reception – planned and executed reception logistics
- Participate in (A) Child Welfare Disproportionality Stakeholder’s Group and (B) Child Welfare Policy Leadership Group – public policy development on racial disproportionality in foster care system
- Significant ongoing policy work in areas of education, economic development, health care, justice and children/family
- Researched and drafted comprehensive Strategic Plan
- Draft budget proposal to expand Commission staffing and funding to adequately address the Commission mission
- Member - Governor’s transition planning team
- Partnered in Jayson Bush pardon by the Governor

- Salary adjustment for minority Commission executive directors
- Partner with Governor's External Affairs to increase representation of African Americans on boards and commissions
- Recruit and integrate five new Commission members
- Strengthened relationships with African American legislators, legal community, higher education leaders and other stakeholders
- Ongoing redefinition of Commission's policy role with stakeholders, community leaders, community members
- Strengthened relationships with Governor's senior staff
- Forged new agency partnerships and alliances
- Ongoing consultation and partnering in agency recruiting of racially diverse candidates
- Redesign and major updating of Commission website; regular updates posted
- Formalize and supplement Commission list serve; send regular updates; broadcast job announcements weekly
- Addressed significant deficits in current audit; updated systems, policies and practices for compliance with state regulations
- Prepare stakeholder materials for public appearances and community meetings
- Recruit Commission interns (ongoing)
- Mentor Foss High School Mock Trial Team in statewide competition
- Mentor two law students - from UW Law School and Seattle University School of Law
- Finalize draft of Commission Annual Report 2004
- Plan and execute Commission retreat

- Promptly address constituent calls and correspondence

The group discussed and agreed to three key commitments and they stated that as a Commission we will:

- Stay focused on mission (policy advisory group)
- Clearly communicate what we can do (do not create expectations we cannot meet) – Use the website to further understanding of what our charge is and other means as well
- Translate what we do so the community understands it and how it is of value to them is “relevant”

The Commissioners decided to individually review the strategic plan, bylaws and enabling legislation during the evening in order to expedite their discussions during the retreat’s next session on September 17. The Commission adjourned at 4:48 p.m.

The second and final session of the AAAC retreat began at 8:16 a.m. on Friday, September 17, 2004.

The group reviewed the duties and responsibilities of the Commission and of the Executive Director. They discussed how these duties were performed in the past and what is expected from here forward. They agreed that the Commissioners need to be the face and voice of the Commission to the community, with staff providing support and functioning as content experts.

The Commissioners discussed how each of them will focus their efforts based on Commission priorities and their individual priorities within their communities. For example, Commissioner Tyner informed the group that he'd already made it clear that his focus in his community will be economic development and that he is bringing his community together to collaborate on this issue.

The Commission also highlighted the need to be clear when they are functioning as individuals versus as Commissioners. One example raised to illustrate this point was that Commissioners, as Commissioners or on behalf of the Commission, cannot endorse candidates or ballot initiatives.

The Commission then discussed and agreed to the following operating commitments:

#### **OPERATING COMMITMENTS**

- Revise template format for monthly reports for ease of use as activity occurs.

Maybe by subject matter (Commissioner Boycan will propose a template.)

- Agendas:

- Keep meeting dates as scheduled
- Change to Friday business meeting
- Public testimony on Saturday; invite the public to focus their testimony on a specific subject area – 10:00 a.m. –3:00 p.m. session. Commissioner, in whose area the meeting is held or in collaboration with the Executive Director, names forum subject
- Continually communicate the Commission's goals and areas of focus to the community
- Each Commissioner formats and focuses the community side of the community meetings to customize them to their community
- At every meeting, highlight what the Commission does – have talking points – do a standard presentation
- When invitations are received from the community, the Commissioners quickly determine how response will be made (by Commissioner or Executive Director or by both)
- Mary provides a communication plan – preferred/primary contact method for each Commissioner and staff put on a list
- Each Commissioner provides updates for website and other forms of communication as often as needed. Activity reports submitted two weeks prior to each Commission meeting
- No sidebar conversations while Commission is meeting



- Getting information in a user friendly way and reading it— need to determine how
- Each Commissioner will communicate efforts they are undertaking in their communities to Executive Director (and work collaboratively with) and to the whole Commission
- Commissioners' discussions will be open and respectful of all points of view

As a result of a detailed and spirited discussion, the Commission agreed to the following eight areas of focus and accomplishment (with assigned leads) with the first two areas given highest priority status:

1. HIGHEST PRIORITY--6 activity reports per year --Chair tracks and holds all accountable -- due two weeks before bi-monthly meetings -- get dates -- Next due November 5, 2004
2. HIGHEST PRIORITY -- Legislative Day -- March 18 - Commissioners Boycan, Brooks, and Houston-Rogers are leads
3. SUPPORT the Education Summit -- October 22-23, 9:00 - 4:00 @ Meany Middle School, Seattle - Commissioners Brooks and Ford will help, Commissioners Ford, Brooks, and Maine -Jackson will contact people and stay engaged
4. SUPPORT the Let Justice Roll - Ed Prince will work it
5. SUPPORT - AIC Economic Development - Establish committee -- (Commissioners Maine-Jackson and Tyner)

6. SUPPORT-Health care Convention on Health Equity with communities of color – “Ways to reduce barriers to health care” funding available
7. SUPPORT U.S. partnerships for learning and education as related to technology (\$35 in from Microsoft) – AAC asked to participate
8. SUPPORT adult and family literacy project – focus on low income and lower grades (less than 2.0 average) children to help through training.

The group then was given an overview by Commissioner Tyner of his economic development effort, which is titled “Access, Influence, Capacity”, or “AIC,” the goal of which is to achieve economic parity. A more detailed summary of this project is attached. Commissioner Tyner concluded his remarks by stressing his commitment to communicate and collaborate with the community. He also invited other Commissioners to participate whenever possible.

Executive Director Regina Jones briefly reported on the Budget/POG (Priorities of Government) and how this approach and the strategic plan interface. She explained that because the strategic plan drives the budget it needs Commission input.

The facilitator then referred the group to the list of issues they had designated during their retreat to the parking lot to be revisited in the future:

- Onsite visits to agencies, programs in cities where we meet to learn ways to impact policies to empower and support local communities
- Partnering with existing organizations and others with similar missions

- Listen and be reference points and refer as possible but recognize we are not a referral agency; develop a referral list
- Review Commissioners roles
- Agenda formatting
- Operational strategy
- Funding
- Focus on contacts with resources – gifts to community; targeted gifts, event underwriting, training underwriting, etc.
- Determine how to make materials as user friendly as possible--Commissioner commitment to read
- Develop strategies to make Legislative Day more impactful—look at timing, coordination, planning, mobilization, funding, players

The retreat ended with the facilitator thanking the Commission and the staff for their open, lively, engaged and respectful participation throughout the retreat and commended all participants for making this such a productive session.

The Commission adjourned at 11:44 a.m.

*Respectfully submitted by Rhonda Hilyer, Facilitator, Agreement Dynamics, Inc.*